



The Cleveland Museum of Art

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17TH-CENTURY FRENCH PRINTMAKER JACQUES BELLANGE IN EXHIBITION FROM BRITISH MUSEUM

Bellange is one of those painters whose licentious manner, completely removed from a proper style, deserves great distrust. It nevertheless had its admirers, and Bellange had a great vogue. . . . Several pieces by him are known, which one cannot bear to look at, so bad is their taste.

— Pierre-Jean Mariette (art connoisseur, 1694-1774)

(Cleveland, OH) Some of the most daring and extraordinary prints of the late 16th and early 17th century will be shown at the Cleveland Museum of Art in a traveling exhibition organized by the British Museum in London. **Jacques Bellange: 17th-Century Printmaker of Lorraine** will bring to audiences virtually the entire print output of this little-known artist from the same provincial dukedom that gave the art world the great painters Claude Lorrain and Georges de la Tour. The exhibition will be on view from August 19 through October 26, 1997. A complementary exhibition of works from CMA's collection sets the stage for understanding Bellange's work: **Mannerism: Italian, French, and Netherlandish Prints, 1520-1620**, will be open August 3 through October 26.

Bellange was court painter to the dukes of Lorraine which, at the time, was an independent duchy but is now part of northeast France near the German border. What little is known about Bellange's life from surviving records indicates that he was a prominent member of the duke's household and the most important artist in Nancy, capital of Lorraine, about 150 miles east of Paris. As court painter, Bellange was commissioned to decorate the walls of the palace and other official buildings in Nancy. These, however, have all been destroyed, as have his easel paintings. His prints were probably intended to spread his reputation beyond Lorraine, and in fact were widely copied and collected in the 17th century.

Bellange produced only forty-eight etchings in five years, from 1611 to 1616, when he died at the age of about forty. All but five of these, plus ten prints by other artists, are included in the exhibition. Eighteen of the works are loaned to the exhibition from the Statens Museum, Copenhagen; one is from the British Museum; except for two from the CMA collection, added for this venue, the remainder come from a private European collection.

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Jane Glaubinger, CMA curator of prints, who is in charge of the exhibition here, says Bellange's prints are filled with psychological drama and a penetrating spirituality. Elongated, sensual figures in contorted poses wear luxurious costumes. These are characteristics of Mannerism, an international artistic style that flourished in western Europe for about one hundred years beginning around 1520. Mannerists rejected the harmony and balance of Renaissance art exemplified by Raphael. Instead, in their pictures, space seems compressed and crowded with figures arranged in complex, theatrical poses. Says Glaubinger: "Bellange's works are as elegant and provocative as those of other Mannerists but are even more intense than most. Bellange's figures engage, even confront, the viewer, and light often seems unnatural or ethereal."

In his introduction to the **Jacques Bellange** catalogue, co-author and exhibition co-curator Antony Griffiths places Bellange's Mannerist style in post-Renaissance art history:

History is always written by the winners, and Mannerism was the loser against the varieties of classicising Baroque and Dutch naturalism that came to dominate by the middle of the [17th] century. By the following century even the greatest connoisseurs, such as Mariette, found it well-nigh impossible to understand why Mannerism had ever been practised, much less why it had been popular.... The re-evaluation of Mannerism in general and Bellange in particular has been left to the twentieth century.... The historical record preserves dim echoes of the sensation that he made in the 1610s; he can still cause as great a sensation in the 1990s.

Bellange was a master etcher. To produce an etching, a copper plate is covered with a waxy compound that is resistant to acid, and lines are drawn through the wax exposing the underlying copper. The plate is then immersed in an acid bath, which eats away, or etches, the metal where it has been exposed. This process may be repeated until the grooves reach varying widths and depths, since the deeper the line, the more ink it will hold, and the darker it prints. To print the plate, ink is forced into the lines and the surface of the plate is wiped clean. A damp sheet of paper is placed on the plate, which is passed through a printing press. Bellange used layers of dense hatching for his backgrounds and drapery, and fine stippling (a pattern of small dots), to shade and give contour to the figures. His printing plates were selectively burnished, or polished, to create bright highlights. This technique was used to startling effect in

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Christ Carrying the Cross, where the area around Christ's head was burnished, making it lighter, giving him an otherworldly aura.

Most of Bellange's prints are religious subjects, but some explore secular themes. Sets of prints representing different trades and occupations were popular in the 17th century. Bellange created images of female gardeners clothed in typical peasant costumes, but the ornate sandals and elaborate containers they carry or balance on their heads evoke the world of court theater and palace garden sculpture. An etching of a *Hurdy-Gurdy Player Attacking a Pilgrim* is one of Bellange's few prints drawn from daily life. It is in keeping with a long tradition of portraying beggars in art. Bellange's depiction is remarkable for the unsparing ugliness of the face and the skilled rendering of textures such as the coarse skin of the figures and the matted fur of a dog.

CMA's complementary exhibition of Mannerist prints has been organized by Sabine Kretzschmar, assistant curator of prints, and Carter Foster, assistant curator of drawings, from the museum's collection. Among the sixty 16th- and 17th-century prints gathered for this show are Jean Duvet's engraving *Satan Bound for a Thousand Years* from the series "The Apocalypse," of which CMA owns one of only seven known complete sets; the engraving *The Great Hercules*, whose excessively exaggerated musculature exemplifies the so-called "bulbous style" of artist Hendrik Goltzius; several other works by Goltzius, who was so famous in his lifetime that he traveled incognito; and Parmigianino's *The Entombment*, generally considered to be the masterpiece of this mannerist painter's twenty etchings.

In conjunction with these exhibitions, art historian and Bellange scholar Amy Worthen will deliver a free lecture at the museum on Friday evening, October 3, at 7 pm. A reception sponsored by The Print Club of Cleveland will follow her lecture. Sabine Kretzschmar will give gallery talks in the **Mannerism** exhibition at 1:30 pm on Wednesday and Sunday, September 17 and 21, and at 2:30 pm on Thursday, September 18.

Jacques Bellange: 17th-Century Printmaker of Lorraine was coordinated and circulated in North America by the Carnegie Museum of Art. Support for the Cleveland showing is provided by Patron Sponsors Sarah and Edwin Roth.